

Four Local Students who Served and Died in World War I, Forgotten, and then Remembered, 100 Years Later

Nov. 15, 2018, WEEHAWKEN—Four local students who served and died during World War I were honored recently at a solemn ceremony at Weehawken High School, one hundred years after they made the ultimate sacrifice. A reminder of that sacrifice came after the Weehawken Historical Commission (WHC) identified the significance of four blocks of marble, each engraved with two initials, which had been unearthed from the high school's grounds.

The marble blocks were originally dedicated by students of the Alexander Hamilton Grammar School, in remembrance of their classmates who lost their lives during World War I. The school stood on the same site where Weehawken High School is now, before being demolished in 1939.

At first the significance of the marble blocks was a mystery. Weehawken High School alumnus Jack Schweberger, Class of '62 remembered seeing the stones on the lawn when he attended the high school. He wanted to know what they were, so he took his question to the WHC. "We had no records in our files, so we started looking in old news clippings, photos, yearbooks and pieced it together," WHC member Donna Daly said. "We subscribe to a few genealogy websites, and this is how we were able to identify the initials and find old news stories."

Through their historical research, WHC members deciphered the meaning of the initials, unveiling the names of the soldiers commemorated by their classmates: Frederick Hansen;

WEEHAWKEN TOWNSHIP

William Kraft; Norman Walpole; and Alexander Saldarini. Walpole and Saldarini served together and died together.

"Their stories became lost and their families are long gone," Daly said, "but these soldiers deserve to be remembered and us reminded of the consequences of war."

Hansen, who lived at 16 49th Street, enlisted for four years when he was 17 in the U.S. Navy as a second class boatswain's mate. He served as gun captain on the USS Texas. At the expiration of his enlistment, he reenlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserves, serving on the cargo steamer USS Herman Frasch. The cargo steamer collided off of the Nova Scotia coast with the tanker USS George G. Henry, and sank. Hansen was among the 17 enlisted men reported missing. He was 22.

Kraft, from 33 Duer Place, enlisted in 1916 in the U.S. Army when he was 16. He was promoted to sergeant. In 1918, while in action near Ronssoy France, he left the safety of his trench seven times to attack the enemy on the Hindenburg line, a German defensive position on the Western Front. Under enemy fire, carrying out the functions of a major, Kraft was killed by an enemy sniper. He was cited for bravery with a Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in action. According to the citation, "The heroism displayed by this noncommissioned officer was an important factor in the success of the attack of his company." He was 18.

Walpole, of 955 Boulevard East, and Saldarini, of 231 4th Street in Union City, were both stationed aboard the USS Tampa. In 1918, as they travelled from Gibraltar to Plymouth, as the

leader of a convoy escorting transports through the Bristol Channel, the USS Tampa was torpedoed. Everyone aboard was killed. Saldarini was 20, and Walpole was 21.

The Weehawken Township School District and the WHC resolved to rededicate the stones and place them where they would not be forgotten again, arranging them together among plantings near the flagpole on the west side of Weehawken High School. As the four young soldiers' classmates would have done, they also placed a World War I grave marker and a 48-star flag on the site.

Participating in honoring the four young men were several Weehawken High School history classes and their instructors; Veterans of Foreign Wars Senior Vice Commander Paul Pizzuta, Commander Chuck Barone, and Chaplain Joe Fredericks; American Legion Post 18 First Vice Commander Troy Mack (the American Legion was founded by veterans returning from Europe after World War I); Weehawken Historical Commission Chairperson Lauren Sherman; and WHC members Donna Daly; Willie Demontreux, Mike and Nancy Boldt.

“With the centennial anniversary of the end of World War I (Armistice Day) this month,” Weehawken Township Mayor Richard F. Turner said, “little did we know that there was also a small memorial right here on the grounds of Weehawken High School,” adding, “The best way to honor these local soldiers is to go out and vote to keep our democracy vibrant.”

Interim Superintendent Terrance Brennan said that as a veteran of the U.S. Air Force who served during the Vietnam War in Okinawa, Japan, he took special pride in the sacrifices of those young

men. “We owe our security and freedom to those veterans,” he said, “and I thank them very much.”

The WHC will mount a display in honor of the centennial of Armistice Day at the Weehawken Free Public Library in December. Once it has set a date, the WHC will post it on its [Weehawken Time Machine](#) web page.

The Weehawken Historical Commission is always searching for photographs, news articles, documents, and historic artifacts to add to its collection. The WHC accepts originals or copies.

It can be contacted on its [Weehawken Time Machine](#) web page.

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Photos on the following four pages

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Caption: Norman Walpole (l.), formerly of 955 Boulevard East, and Alexander Saldarini (r.), formerly of 231 4th Street in Union City, in 1918 were stationed together aboard the USS Tampa, which was torpedoed, killing all on board. Saldarini was 20 and Walpole was 21.

Photo Credit: *Weehawken Historical Commission*

Caption: *William Kraft, formerly of 33 Duer Place, enlisted in the U.S. Army when he was 16. In 1918, while in action near Ronssoy France, he left the safety of his trench seven times to attack a German defensive position on the Western Front. Killed by an enemy sniper, Kraft was cited for bravery with a Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in action. He was 18.*

Photo Credit: *Weehawken Historical Commission*





FRED H. HANSEN.

Caption: *Frederick Hansen, who lived at 16 49th Street, enlisted for four years when he was 17 in the U.S. Navy and served as a 2nd-class boatswain's mate and as gun captain on the USS Texas. He reenlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserves, serving on the cargo steamer USS Herman Frasch. The steamer collided off of the Nova Scotia coast with a tanker, and sank. He was 22.*

Photo Credit: *The Jersey Journal, Oct. 11, 1918*



The Weehawken Historical Commission identified the significance of the marble stones discovered at Weehawken High School. The WHC had the initials of four World War I veterans who attended the school which used to stand where the high school does now.

Photo Credit: *Weehawken Historical Commission*



Caption: *The memory of four local young men who sacrificed their lives in World War I was revived recently, and the old marble blocks engraved with their initials were reinstalled in a place of honor on the Weehawken High School grounds.*

Photo Credit: *Donna Daly, Weehawken Historical Commission*



Caption: *Weehawken High School history students listened attentively as the Township School District honored four local students who gave their lives in World War I.*

Photo Credit: *Gabrielle Jonas, Weehawken Township*